

# what's up?

## unintentional injuries

### INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

#### What's it all about?

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death among adolescents 11 to 19 years old in Washington. These kinds of injuries are caused by behaviors such as not wearing a seatbelt, riding a bike or motorcycle without a helmet, drinking and driving, riding with a drunk driver, not wearing a life jacket, and participating in athletic activity without protective gear. Most unintentional injuries are not accidents because they can be prevented.

#### Why does it matter?

- Injuries kill more adolescents than all diseases combined.
- Nationally, nearly 60% of all deaths among adolescents 10 to 19 years old were due to unintentional injuries.
- About 80% of all unintentional injury deaths of Washington adolescents are thought to be preventable.
- Since 1995, an average of 125 teens 15 to 19 years old in Washington have died each year from unintentional injuries.
- In Washington, 15- to 19-year-old boys are about 2 times more likely to die from an unintentional injury than girls in the same age group, but the number of female deaths due to unintentional injury nearly doubled from 1999 to 2001.
- Teens with physical and psychological or developmental disabilities have higher rates of injury.

#### What are the details?

##### Motor Vehicle Crashes

- In Washington, 40% of deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds are due to motor vehicle crashes.
- Alcohol is involved in more than a third of adolescent driver fatalities. In the past month in Washington, about 1-in-5 8th graders and 1-in-4 10th and 12th graders report riding in a car when the driver had been drinking. Girls are more likely than boys to report frequently riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking.

- The risk for motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16- to 19-year-olds than among any other age group. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are 4 times more likely to crash than older drivers.
- Adolescents in the U.S. are especially at risk for fatal crashes at night.

##### Drowning

- Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for 15- to 19-year-olds in Washington state. From 1997 to 2001, there were about 70 unintentional drownings among Washington youth in this age group.

- The majority of drownings among Washington teens and young adults occurred in lakes and rivers.
- Nationwide, alcohol is involved in about 40% of all adolescent drownings.

##### Bicycle-related injuries

- Among Washington teens who report riding a bicycle in the past year, about 60% of 8th graders and 70% of 10th and 12th graders say they rarely or never wore a helmet.

## What can I do?

Steps to protect teens may seem obvious, but how do we get adolescents to consistently use these safety measures?

Teens base their choices on many different influences. Adults can help teens make more informed and thoughtful decisions about the risks they take. The following are some helpful tips.

- Teach and motivate teens to choose safe behaviors to protect themselves, such as wearing bicycle helmets, so they can continue to do the activities they enjoy safely.
- Recognize and praise teens for taking preventive measures and using good judgment.
- Enforce safety rules and make sure your teen has adequate adult supervision during recreational activities.
- Make sure your teen has the proper physical and psychological conditioning to participate in sports activities.
- Make agreements with teens to follow a particular plan of action if they find themselves in potentially dangerous situations. Be careful not to punish teens for being in those situations when they do need to call on you.
- Be a good role model for thinking about risks, making informed decisions and practicing safe behaviors—always wear your bike helmet, buckle up in the car and never drink and drive.

### In your community

- Create safer environments, such as fences around pools, or properly stored weapons.
- Make sure teens have many safe, enjoyable activities to choose from.

### What helps teens avoid injury?

- Wearing seatbelts.
- Knowing rules of the road when driving, walking or biking.
- Understanding that alcohol and other substances impair one's judgment and may contribute to the likelihood of many injuries and even death.
- Wearing helmets for bicycling and other sports.
- Taking precautions against sports and recreational injuries by drinking adequate amount of liquids and using safety equipment appropriately.
- Knowing and using water safety rules to prevent drowning or near-drowning brain injury.
- Wearing a life jacket and knowing the waters while boating or swimming in lakes and rivers.
- Restricting access to weapons and ammunition and knowing safety rules to follow with guns and other weapons.
- Knowing how to get help in emergencies.

**hot  
links!**

**National SAFE KIDS Campaign** 202-662-0600; [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)  
Prevention information and safety tips

**Think First** [www.thinkfirst.org/news/facts.html](http://www.thinkfirst.org/news/facts.html)  
Spinal cord injury prevention

**The Safe America Foundation** [www.safeamerica.org](http://www.safeamerica.org)  
A site devoted to injury prevention for adults and kids

**American Medical Association** [www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html)  
Guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services (GAPS)

**The David and Lucile Packard Foundation** [www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)  
Search publications for “Unintentional Injuries”

**Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002** [www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/](http://www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/)

**National Center for Injury Prevention and Control** [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/ncipchm.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/ncipchm.htm)

**Bike Helmet Safety Institute** [www.bhsi.org](http://www.bhsi.org)

Washington State Department of Health  
DOH Pub 910-123 11/2003  
[www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.



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